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Patience, Hot Joe, & Lead Time: Marshall's 125th Anniversary Celebration

by Ellayne Velde-Conyers • Director, Lyon County Museum
& Jim Tate • Editor, Marshall Independent

On July 2-6, 1997, Marshall, a community of 12,500 in southwest Minnesota, celebrated its 125th anniversary. The Lyon County Historical Society took the lead in organizing what became a very large community-wide project. We hope this article, taken from a longer one submitted by the two authors, can give the reader the feel of undertaking such a project and useful information about how it was done. For further information and a copy of the full article, contact the Lyon County Historical Society, 114 North Third St., Marshall, MN 56258; (507) 537-6580.

Lead Time and How We Used It

In 1995, Mayor Bob Byrnes approached the Lyon County Historical Society with a request to put together a 125th anniversary celebration. This was two full years before the actual event, and clearly indicated Byrnes' foresight about the kind of time it takes to pull off something of this scope successfully.

We began with a committee, of course. A steering committee made up of members of the Lyon County Historical Society, the city council, the Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the city Parks and Recreation Department, the school district and members of the media met in March 1995 and started to brainstorm. A 30-member steering committee was formed, and within it, a kind of executive committee, the "Big Six." A little later, committees were formed for each of the events.

It took a couple of these brainstorming sessions before a rough plan evolved. First, we needed to find out what Marshallites wanted.

A letter was sent to 750 businesses and organizations within the city, inviting them and all interested citizens to attend a town meeting. The meeting generated more than one idea for every year of the town's existence. Ideas kept coming like the Southwest Minnesota wind, so the "Big Six" finally had to step back and say, "Enough, already." A

manageable number of activities was chosen and is listed in the box to the left.

The first order of business was to get started on the historical book. Volunteers culled the newspaper files. During January, 1996, the museum was closed to visitors for an all-out research effort. By March, 1996, boxes of information copied from the newspapers and sorted by subject were hauled to the Twin Cities, where author John Radzilowski, a Marshall native, began writing.

To pay fees and expenses, museum staffers visited six local businesses and two service organizations to ask for financial help. It took just five hours in 1995 to raise \$2,500.

And, to commission an artist to do a prairie diorama

The Package of Basic Ideas

- History book: Hire a professional to write a book at once readable (not more than 400 pages) and reasonably priced.
- Commemorative painting of the city: Commission a professional.
- Municipal band concert, community sing and ice cream social.
- Historical re-enactment type events: style show, beard-growing contest, bike road race and antique quilt show.
- Civil War re-enactors and cannon salute.
- All-school (public and parochial) reunion.
- Fourth of July: Hold regular park activities (family games, races, fishing contest, entertainment), and programs, and produce the regular fireworks finale at night.
- Descendents of early settlers: Hold a reception.
- "Back to the Blue Moon" dances.
- Air show and fly-in breakfast.
- Christian rock concert.
- Historical pageant.
- Community picnic.
- Time capsule program. (Local mortician Doug Hamilton donated a burial vault to be used as the time capsule. The vault was buried in the park, to be reopened in 2072.)
- Fireworks finale.



Marshall's 125th Anniversary Celebration

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at the museum and a commemorative print of the city, a grant of \$3,000 was received from the Southwest Minnesota Arts and Humanities Council. James E. Dahl, also from Marshall, was hired for this project.

Time and Money

An old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration had been held since 1992, so it seemed natural to have Marshall's 125th on the weekend of the Fourth. The weekend event soon became a five-day celebration. Once the date was set, the steering committee was split into event committees. Two people—city council member Maureen

Above all, do not forget patience and plenty of "hot Joe." And keep the spirit of the celebration going.

Stores and museum director Ellayne Velde-Conyers—served as co-chairs of the entire event.

The Fund Drive Committee quickly became very important. Members of this group were selected to reflect the kind of business leaders willing to go out and raise donations. Each event committee chair presented a budget. The budgets were evaluated, and the Fund Drive Committee pooled its information and came up with an overall budget of \$50,000.

From a master list, the Fund Drive Committee chose business and organization contacts the members felt comfortable contacting, and the rest were divided equally.

Fund-drive packets were prepared in each of the four historically named giving categories. (See box at the left.)

Donors in each category received awards such as dance tickets, commemorative souvenirs, a copy of the history book, their names inscribed on a commemorative plaque, or listed in a "coffee table" brochure. The top donors among businesses and organizations received a free

ad in the *Marshall Independent* newspaper giving a short history of the business or organization. Souvenir sales were brisk and provided a source of income for the museum and the celebration. This committee decided to offer only high quality merchandise, such as Fenton glass bells and Red Wing and Rowe pottery.

Community fund-raisers were another important source of revenue. The first was a concert by well-

known folk artist Michael Johnson on Dec. 14, 1996, on the campus of Southwest State University. One hour before the show, one of Southwest Minnesota's famous blizzards decided to blow in, but the concert went on, playing to a full house.

A second, larger fund-raiser was held in June, 1997, when the steering committee joined with the Shades of the Past Car Club for its annual '50s Revival Weekend. They brought in singer and songwriter

Bobby Vee. This event drew people from a three-state region. Tables placed in front of the stage were sold in advance for \$200 to businesses and organizations. Many got

into the spirit of things by dressing in '50s attire; prizes were awarded to the best-dressed couple.

Special Events

Marshall was home to the Blue Moon Ballroom until it burned down in 1981. People gathered at the ballroom from all over the region to dance to famous bands, and their memories are dear to their hearts. Four "Back to the Blue Moon" dances were scheduled on the Saturday night in locations around Marshall. This idea was a huge success and may become a permanent part of the yearly Fourth of July celebration.

A second grant was received from the Southwest Minnesota Arts and Humanities Council for money to write and produce a historical pageant. Perry Lueders, retired English professor at Southwest State University (SSU) and director of the Canby Community Players, donated his time to write and direct the pageant. Another retired SSU professor, Dr. Robert Whitcomb, wrote and performed "The Marshall Suite." The Melo-Tones (three Lutherans and a nun) sang four-part harmony to old songs that related to the period portrayed on stage. The nationally known Southwest School of Dance developed and performed several ballet numbers. Still another former SSU faculty member, Janet Jackson, wrote a poem summarizing the city's history that was performed to a "rap" beat at the end of the pageant. With the help of the grant and an American Legion donation, honorariums were paid and the pageant was videotaped for museum archives and for purchase.



Fund Drive Packets

- Ulysses S. Grant President's Award (over \$1,500);
 - Horace S. Austin Governor's Award (\$1,000 to \$1,499);
 - John Ward Mayor's Award (\$500 to \$999);
 - C. H. Whitney Pioneer Award (\$100 to \$499).
- (Each of these persons held office during Marshall's first year, 1872.)



Marshall's 125th Anniversary Celebration

Continued from p. 2

Media and Public Relations

Prior to and during the celebration, the local media worked hand-in-hand with the committee to inform the public of the upcoming events, promote the activities and document the celebration. This cooperation took many forms, including: in-kind advertising; free newspaper ads; "125th vignettes" donated by the local radio stations; and a 156-page magazine on Marshall's history produced by the *Marshall Independent*.

The Historical Society's twice-monthly public access television program, "Lyon County Historical Society News and Views," devoted 15 segments to interviews with community and celebration leaders, and Studio 8 (public access) employees videotaped segments of the celebration and made copies for the museum. Fourth-graders from West Side Elementary School in Marshall produced their own history book of Marshall, which they sold at school and the museum, with money going toward technology equipment for their school.

Conclusion

What went wrong? Nothing, which is scary in itself. Over the five days organizers kept waiting for something—anything—to go wrong, but it never did. Marshall did not experience a flood, the power did not fail, and all workers showed up, on time. Even the weather cooperated: five days of sunshine.

Because of the combined efforts of grant writing, business and organization solicitation, community fund-raising and ticket sales, the project came in under budget. The money left over will provide a revolving fund to help sponsor future community events.

Putting something together of this scope lent credence to the saying, "Plan your work, and work your plan."

Everyone, both local and visitor, enjoyed themselves, because there was something on the schedule to interest every taste. Community members took ownership of the event. Neither the Historical Society nor the steering committee could have done it without a town full of volunteers and

businesses and organizations willing to make time and dollar investments toward working together to celebrate the beginnings, the progress, and to anticipate the future. To make it happen, someone, in this case the Lyon County Historical Society, just had

Things We Did & Suggest You Do, Too

- Participate in your town's "City Week," to show slides of how your town once looked.
- Do a "then-and-now" comparison.
- Write a "thank you" letter to donors within 48 hours.
- Keep in touch with volunteers—thank them, encourage them, help them where you can.
- Make contact with clubs, organizations and business groups and offer to present a program on their town's history and encourage them to participate in the celebration.
- Take photos of donors giving a check and submit it to your local newspaper for publication. Or, write a letter to the editor, thanking donors.
- Try to give everyone the chance to participate, whether as a volunteer, in-kind donor or monetary donor.
- Include seniors, school children, college students, Group Home residents, juveniles on probation, Sentenced to Serve adults. Again: include EVERYONE.
- Ask for help. If you are asking for in-kind donations, state that right away. Most people and/or businesses are willing to help. Be honest about how you want them to help.
- Encourage the public to bring in old photos that can be used in the book. Then take this opportunity to get copies of the photos.
- Encourage people to share their memories of the past, perhaps in a "Memory Book."
- Encourage family, neighborhoods, and "old-timers" to put together walking or driving tours of your town. Marshall offered four such tours that were not only used during the celebration, but have become another reason to visit the museum to rent or purchase a tape on a Sunday afternoon.

NOTE: After a certain point, the celebration goes on auto-pilot. It simply runs itself. That's where all the preparation work pays off handsomely.

The Story of Marshall's 125th Anniversary as Told in Numbers

65,000 total participants;
15,000 participated in July 4 park activities and fireworks;
12,000 watched the parade;
10,000 watched the air show;
7,000 participated in events at the park on the last day (events included a Christian rock concert as well as the time-capsule program and fireworks finale);
3,500 registered at the museum;
1,700 attended the "Back to the Blue Moon" dances;
650 attended the all-school reunion;
600 saw the historical pageant.



State Grants-in-Aid Awarded—Fall 1997 Grants Cycle

The Minnesota Historical Society, on recommendation of the MHS Grants Review Committee in October and after approval by the Society's governing board in November, awarded the grants listed below. The funds were provided by the State of Minnesota. Work on the projects is scheduled to begin this winter. For information about these grants and the MHS grants program, call Mandy Skypala, (612) 296-5478.

Anoka County • City of Blaine, \$5,130 for restoration of **1922 American LaFrance Fire Engine**, Blaine

Brown County • Wanda Gág House Association, \$7,500 for **Wanda Gág Childhood Home** dining room restoration, New Ulm

- Turner Hall, \$5,000 for **Turner Hall** murals restoration project, New Ulm

Chisago County • Chisago County Historical Society, \$2,400 for purchase of **microfilm reader/printer**, Rush City

Cottonwood County • Cottonwood County Historical Society, \$3,000 for purchase of **microfilm reader/printer**, Windom

Crow Wing County • Crow Wing County Historical Society, \$1,620 for purchase of **microfilm**, Brainerd

Dodge County • Dodge County Historical Society, \$3,300 for installation of **HVAC system** for county museum, Mantorville

Douglas County • Douglas County Historical Society, \$7,500 for **Knute Nelson House** window replacement project, Alexandria

Fillmore County • Fillmore County Historical Society, \$3,000 for purchase of **microfilm reader/printer**, Fountain

Freeborn County • Freeborn County Historical Society, \$1,822 for purchase of **microfilm**, Albert Lea

Hennepin County • Hopkins Historical Society, \$630 for purchase of **microfilm**, Hopkins

Lake County • Lake County Historical Society, \$7,500 for **Two Harbors Light Station** boiler replacement, Two Harbors

Meeker County • City of Litchfield, Library, \$2,700 for purchase of **microfilm reader/printer**, Litchfield

Nobles County • Nobles County Historical Society, \$1,000 for purchase of **microfilm**, Worthington

Norman County • Norman County Historical Society, \$1,400 for **Ada Congregational Church** furnace installation, Ada

Otter Tail County • Otter Tail County Historical Society, \$950 for **Otter Tail County rural school survey**, Fergus Falls

Pine County • Hinckley Fire Museum, \$3,000 for **Northern Pacific Depot** preservation project, Hinckley

Roseau County • Roseau County Historical Society, \$600 for purchase of **microfilm**, Roseau

Saint Louis County • Range Genealogical Society, \$2,685 for purchase of **microfilm**, Chisholm

Scott County • Minnesota Valley Restoration Project, \$5,000 for research and planning for **Dakota Village at Murphy's Landing**, Shakopee

Sherburne County • Sherburne County Historical Society,

\$3,000 for purchase of **microfilm reader/printer**, Becker

Stearns County • Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict, \$2,500 for **St. Benedict's Monastic Heritage Museum** collections project, St. Joseph

- The Museum at St. John's, \$2,000 for **museum storage improvement** project, Colledgeville

- Stearns County Historical Society, \$7,500 for **energy management and building automation system conversion**, St. Cloud

Steele County • Steele County Historical Society, \$1,567 for **textile storage** project, Owatonna

Todd County • Todd County Historical Society, \$3,000 for purchase of **microfilm reader/printer**, Long Prairie



The Two Harbors Light Station in Lake County.

SHPO National Register files

NOTE: WINTER 1998 GRANTS CYCLE: \$90,000 AVAILABLE

Applications will be accepted for the **winter** grants cycle after the first of the year. Pre-applications, Jan. 9; final applications, Feb. 6; Grants Review Committee meeting, March 19.



State Grants-in-Aid—Fall 1997 Grants Cycle

continued from page 4

Watonwan County • St. James Opera House Restoration, Inc., \$3,000 for **St. James Opera House Historic Structures Report** preparation, St. James

Wright County • Cokato Historical Society, \$5,500 for **Akerlund Photographic Studio** restoration project, Cokato

Yellow Medicine County • Minnesota's Machinery Museum, \$6,196 for **museum security system** installation, Hanley Falls

County and Local Preservation Project Grants Awarded (funded with State Bond funds)

Brown County • City of New Ulm, \$40,000 for **Hermann Monument** restoration, phase 1, New Ulm



The Hermann Monument in New Ulm, Brown County.

SHPD National Register files

Carver County • Suburban Hennepin Regional Park District, \$40,000 for **Wendelin Grimm Farmstead** roof and foundation stabilization, Victoria vicinity

Dodge County • City of Kasson, \$39,500 for **Kasson Water Tower** restoration, phase 2, Kasson

Goodhue County • Hay Creek Township, \$10,212 for **District No. 20 School** for roof and exterior restoration, Hay Creek

Hennepin County • City of Minnetonka, \$30,000 for **Charles H. Burwell House** restoration project, Minnetonka

Houston County • Houston County, \$10,000 for **Houston County Courthouse** masonry restoration, Caledonia

Meeker County • City of Dassel, \$24,265 for **Universal Laboratories Building** restoration, phase IV, Dassel

Mille Lacs County • Mille Lacs County, \$10,000 for **Mille Lacs County Courthouse** rotunda windows and entry restoration, Milaca

Mower County • City of Adams, \$11,530 for **First National Bank of Adams** windows restoration, Adams

Otter Tail County • City of Perham, \$12,500 for **Perham Public Library** accessibility and building restoration, Perham

Sibley County • City of Gibbon, \$15,875 for **Gibbon Village Hall** windows restoration project, Gibbon

- City of Henderson, \$23,000 for **Sibley County Courthouse** windows restoration, Henderson

Saint Louis County • City of Ely, \$28,244 for **Pioneer Mine Buildings** and "A" Headframe, Miner's Dry rehabilitation, Ely

- Independent School District #701, \$37,500 for **Hibbing High School** auditorium accessibility, Hibbing

Stearns County • St. Cloud Housing & Redevelopment Authority, \$20,000 for **Paramount Theatre** restoration project, St. Cloud

Waseca County • Waseca County Historical Society, \$30,000 for **Philo C. Bailey House** restoration for use as a research center, Waseca

Washington County • Washington County, \$24,300 for **Washington County Courthouse** exterior restoration, Stillwater

Watonwan County • Watonwan County, \$25,000 for **Watonwan County Courthouse** roof restoration, St. James

Funding for Historic Sites Available

The Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) will accept proposals for projects designed to sustain and enhance Minnesota's natural resources. Funding strategies include a category for the protection, enhancement, reuse or interpretation of historic sites. For a complete copy of the Request for Proposals, call the LCMR office at (612) 296-2406 or check the Commission's web page at www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/lcmr/lcmr.htm. The deadline for submissions is February 13, 1998.



MHO Keynote: William Mulligan on Making Connections

This article is a brief summary of “Making Connections: Local Historical Societies and Heritage Tourism,” the keynote speech given at the 1998 annual meeting of Minnesota Historical Organizations by William Mulligan, associate professor of history, Murray State University in Kentucky, and director, Forrest C. Pogue Public History Institute..

Professor Mulligan asked us to think of two general kinds of connections that can help historical organizations succeed: First, show how the past can help explain the present, “the point where we, especially the visitors, are.” Equally important, connect the local to the general: show how this place, or this community, relates to the historical content of your exhibit, site or production.

To put these into practice, he suggested that we “think of all our programs, exhibits, and activities as a series of connections that can provide a basis for interest by people with different experiences.” And link up one’s own place with what the nearby area has to offer: “We also need to connect all the resources needed for a trip for potential visitors—where they can stay, where they can eat, what else there is to do and see... Connecting with other museums, businesses, historic districts and sites is crucial for success.” Create a “coherent experience for visitors,” he suggests; for example: connect local resources with walking or driving tours.

Heritage Tourism and the stuff of history

To illustrate his approach, Professor Mulligan told a story of successful heritage tourism development. McLean County, Ky., was 120th out of 120 counties in tourism revenue and a bill had been introduced to eliminate the small, rural county. Mulligan worked with county officials to develop the heritage tourism potential of one Civil War site in the county. A successful re-enactment was held, and it led to others, to driving tours, to plans for a museum, and to involvement by people from all over the county. Tourism revenue rose dramatically and plans to eliminate the county faded away. Here Mulligan applied a simple rule: “All of our communities have interesting and important stories to tell and historic sites and materials with which to tell them. There are people who want to hear these stories and visit these sites. What we do with the resources we have is up to us.”

Mulligan’s suggestions are based on the idea that “the real stuff of history has a special power, a tremendous hold on our imagination and emotions.” He refers to it as “the power of the authentic,” a phrase he recalls from a presentation by University of Minnesota-Duluth professor Fred Schroeder in

1976. It is human nature that being present at a place where a historical event took place gives us new understandings of the event. This happened to Mulligan when he visited the site of the Battle of Saratoga (1777), though he had long been familiar with written accounts of the battle. It also happened when he held in his hands a few leaves from the Gutenberg Bible, and also the cover letter from the Declaration of Independence, which reads:

July 5, 1776, Philadelphia

Dear Sir, Please arrange to have the following resolution of the Continental Congress read in public as soon as possible.

Yours truly, John Hancock

“Suddenly,” he said, “the Declaration became more real, not just a ‘great event,’ but something that happened in real time to real people.”

Local history on a long-term rise?

This impulse to enjoy the historical experience has been spreading widely in recent years. “The big buzzwords in travel and tourism today are heritage tourism. People want to connect with the specific character of the place they are visiting—museums, structures, and sites that reflect its history and particular character,” Mulligan said

Economic and demographic factors suggest that this trend is going to continue for some time, and, with mass media hurrying our culture toward uniformity, “people want to see the particular and the different.” One example of the persistence of regional differences that can play a role in heritage tourism is food. He mentioned bar-b-q, burgoo (a Kentucky squirrel-based dish), pasties, and won over the audience with lutefisk, when he said, “I was once in a lutefisk-eating contest to raise money for a local historical society—so I know lutefisk, and have paid some dues for local history.”

Those who attended the meeting were rewarded with an outstanding example of the power of the authentic by a tour of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District and the Stone Arch Bridge in Minneapolis. The tour was led by St. Anthony Falls program manager David Wiggins and Robert Clouse, head of the MHS archaeology department.





Carver County Racing to Build an Addition by Leanne Brown

It is a time of growth and change at the Carver County Historical Society (CCHS). We are building a 10,000-square-foot addition onto our current 5,000-square-foot museum. The increased space will allow for more storage, five new exhibit galleries, an improved library, staff offices and a conference room.



This is the front of the new CCHS addition.

The current museum building was constructed by the county in 1960 to house the Society's collections. As typically happens, it didn't take too many years before the building was filled to capacity. The collections had to be displayed in an open-storage method to use the

space most efficiently. Because there was very little labeling, the display area looked more like an antique shop than a museum.

In the mid-1980s, the CCHS board and staff approached the Carver County commissioners about funding a new building or addition. The response was encouraging, but in 1987, the state required the county to build a new county justice center. The Historical Society's space needs were quickly pushed to the back burner.

Early in 1996, CCHS approached the county again about funding an addition to the museum. The

response was mixed, but a slim majority favored the project. We had to act quickly, because two of the three commissioners who supported the project were not running for re-election in November (1996). Things went our way, and in the spring of 1996, the county approved the construction of a \$750,000 addition to the museum.

During the election campaigns, the Historical Society's addition became an issue. Although the candidates supported the Historical Society's *mission*, they did not believe that county funding should pay for its expansion. Fearing that we could have lost the addition, the building foundations were poured before election day. Since then, however, construction pace has slowed dramatically. We are behind schedule, but are hopeful that the project will be finished in December 1997.

Happily, the community is very supportive of the project. The response to our fund-raising capital campaign has gone very well. Although the county is paying \$750,000 for the addition, CCHS is paying for the museum's new interpretive exhibits, furniture and equipment. While we set our initial goal at \$100,000, we have already raised more than \$130,000.

Like most construction/remodelling projects, this expansion has required a great deal of patience and flexibility. But the new and improved Carver County Historical Society museum will be well worth the wait.

Leanne Brown has been a member of the CCHS staff for almost three years, and its executive director since March 1997.

Looking Ahead to Minnesota Archaeology Week 1998: Kickoff Meeting

An informal meeting will be held on Thursday, Dec. 11, for Archaeology Week coordinators, hosts and funders to review past events and discuss plans for 1998. The meeting will begin at 4 p.m. in the Irvine Room, Level 1, at the Minnesota History Center, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul.

Items to be discussed include: coordination between Minnesota Archaeology Week (May 2-10) and Historic Preservation Week (May 11-16); event scheduling deadlines (preliminary plans, Dec. 15; final plans, Feb. 1); poster theme and content; fundraising and co-sponsorship strategies; Minnesota Archaeology Education network.

Bring publicity examples and educational materials you would like to share through the network. This is the only general planning meeting now scheduled for MAW. RSVP to John Lauber at (612) 296-5434, or Phyllis Messenger at (612) 523-2682.



Newspaper Project Seeks Special Historical Editions Statewide by Ruth Bauer Anderson



When was the high school auditorium built? Did your city have a special diamond jubilee? Did your local newspaper print brief biographical sketches and photographs of all the home town boys that were fighting in World War II?

Your local newspaper can probably answer these and many other questions. However, the history contained in many Minnesota newspapers is unknown to most individuals; since most newspapers have no indexes, it can be extremely difficult to locate the golden nuggets in these historical editions.

I received a research leave from my position as reference associate at the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) to answer some of these questions. Specifically, my project is to locate as many of the *special historical editions* of Minnesota newspapers as possible. The list now includes more than 300 separate editions.

We are also seeking assistance in locating the dates of additional historical editions of newspapers from the entire state. For example, in 1927, more than 230 Minnesota newspapers participated in Greater Minnesota Week, which was an effort to promote the

entire state of Minnesota. The *Swift County Monitor* did a special edition for this on June 10, 1927, and another special edition on automobiles on June 24, 1927. Does anyone have any knowledge of any other special editions from 1927?

Here are some other possibilities. Do you know of any special historical editions, such as the 25th, 40th, or 60th anniversaries of the founding of your town, school or county? Do you know of a special edition for the building of an auditorium, hospital or other building in your community?

If you have any information about newspaper accounts of events such as these, please contact the author at the MHS Reference Department, (612) 297-7432; email: ruth.anderson@mnhs.org. The project is scheduled for completion by February 1998, so there is not much time to send in your information. In the meantime, if you would like to know about any of the materials related to your community that I have already located, please write or call. I will be glad to answer as many questions as I can.

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Britta Bloomberg, Head,
Historic Preservation, Field Services and
Grants Department
David Nystuen, Field Coordinator
James Smith, Editor

<http://www.mnhs.org>



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
345 KELLOGG BOULEVARD WEST
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55102-1906

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